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The Anderson Strategy

"We hit you—pow! Then you issue a denial, and—bam!—we really let you have it"

By Susan Sheehan

Few reporters ever go from writing news to being news, and certainly no reporter has made the passage more conspicuously than Jack Anderson in 1972. As a result of two journalistic coups—the publication of secret White House documents showing the Nixon Administration's duplicity during the India-Pakistan war and the publication of the Dita Beard memo, which suggested that, in return for \$400,000 toward the cost of the Republican convention, the Justice Department made a favorable out-of-court settlement with International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. in an antitrust case—Anderson, whose byline appears under his syndicated "Washington Merry-Go-Round" column in 965 daily and weekly newspapers in the United States and abroad, has become a front-page headline: "Anderson Urges Secret-Data Curb," "Anderson Accuses Kleindienst of Lying About I.T.T. Case," "Anderson Wins Pulitzer Prize."

Two weeks ago, when he broadcast a false story that Senator Thomas F. Eagleton, the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee, had been arrested for drunken and reckless driving during the 1960's, Anderson learned the special pain reserved for the famous: the well-publicized fiasco. After he conceded that he could not produce Eagleton's arrest record, the front-page headline read "Anderson Backs Off." A couple of years ago, his shocking error would have attracted little attention.

Anderson has been accorded the full-dress media treatment rendered nowadays to celebrities-of-the-moment; be they perpetrators of autobiographical hoaxes, political assassins or muckrackers. His face, which reminded The New Yorker of a bed, "not an unmade one but a fresh, crisp, no-nonsense hotel bed," has been on the covers of Time and Parade. Morley Safer profiled Anderson admiringly on "Sixty Minutes" while William Buckley devoted 60 anything-but-admiring minutes to him on "Firing Line." "You exercise the right to inspect the files of anyone who wants to rat on his employer. You just look over them lasciviously and decide what to hand out to your enormous constituency," Buckley charged. Lasciviousness is in the eye of the beholder, but Anderson's constituency is an undeniably enormous 67 million. The "Merry-Go-Round" now runs in over 300 more newspapers than it did three years ago when Anderson took it over upon the death of its long-time proprietor, Drew Pearson.

Anderson is enjoying the lucrative fringe benefits that accrue to a byliner-turned-headliner. His lecture agents are booking more lectures than he can deliver, at a fee that has risen to \$2,000; Random House has given him a \$100,000 advance for an

account of the India-Pakistan and I.T.T. affairs, to be called "The Anderson Papers"; and a company has been formed to package Anderson for national radio and television.

"Anderson's the overnight success story of the year," a Congressional aide commented last month, which brought to mind a remark once made by a ballerina credited with instant stardom. "I don't know any other business where a girl can work eight days a week for nine years and suddenly be proclaimed an overnight success," the ballerina observed. In Anderson's case, notoriety came after 25 mostly unrecognized years of working in Washington, albeit a mere six days a week. As all of us readers and/or watchers of Time, Parade, "Sixty Minutes," etc., already know, Anderson does not muckrake on the Sabbath; he is a practicing Mormon and devoted family man who prefers to spend Sunday in church and at home with his wife and nine children.

Jack Anderson came to Washington in the spring of 1947 and applied for a job with Drew Pearson. Pearson already had a few reporters and secretaries helping him with the column he had launched 15 years earlier and with his influential Sunday-night radio show, but he happened to have a vacancy on his staff; he had just learned that one of his reporters was a card-carrying member of the Communist party and felt that keeping a Communist on his staff would be carrying his liberalism a little too far. He wanted to replace the reporter with a young man who had had some newspaper experience. Anderson was then 24 and already had almost 12 years of newspapering behind him.

Pearson hired Anderson in April, 1947, as a part-time assistant at \$50 a week. "Within a few weeks—I was diligent and I was lucky—I nailed a guy Drew was anxious to nail," Anderson recalls. "He decided I was holding my own and made me a full-time assistant at \$100 a week." Before long Pearson considered his youngest employe his chief investigative reporter. Over the years, many of the column's major exposés were Anderson's handiwork, among them the series on Senator Thomas Dodd's financial transgressions that led to Dodd's political demise.

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